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SOUTHERN EDUCATION

The Large Summer School of the South at Knoxville—A Sketch of the Work of the Southern Education Board

The Summer School of the South, which has recently concluded its six weeks' term at Knoxville, Tenn., was in many respects an institution unique in the history of our country. It was a school for teachers. These came from every quarter of the South. It was a gathering not for play, but for work. The total enrollment of 2,019 in actual attendance made it, as Dr. G. Stanley Hall has declared, "the largest in the world."

The impressiveness of the School is not adequately represented by its numbers. The character of the institution was marked by the value of the work performed, by the intelligent earnestness, the unsparing industry and the broad sympathies of the student body.

And yet the numerical significance of such a gathering is not to be overlooked. In a part of our country where the population is so largely rural (there are about as many cities of 25,000 inhabitants and over in the one small State of Massachusetts as in all the Southern States combined) and where many sections are so thinly settled by the white population that great common enterprises can seldom be attempted, the moral and educational value of numbers is of evident importance. The reader cannot well understand the tasks and problems

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of the South till he stops to realize that the combined white population of two such States as South Carolina and Alabama does not equal the white population of the city of Chicago. The white population of the city of Greater New York exceeds the aggregate white population of the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina and Mississippi. A gathering of more than two thousand men and women, fairly representative of the potential and actual teaching force of such a section, was therefore both an achievement and an inspiration. It was also of far-reaching social significance.

Knoxville proved an admirable location for such a school. The city was sufficiently near to a majority of the Southern teachers to simplify the problem of transportation; it was far enough away, and of sufficient altitude, to afford the conditions of variety and change. Knoxville, its population being about 33,000, was also large enough to afford the local advantages of a sustaining public interest, together with adequate accommodation for the many guests, and yet the city was not so large that the Summer School could fail at any time to hold its rightful place as the most important interest of the community. The School found its home in the grounds and buildings of the University of Tennessee—a site of rare interest and charm. Too much cannot be said in appreciation of the alert and generous hospitality of the University authorities and of the people of Knoxville.

The quality of the personnel of the student body was the subject of much comment on the

part of visitors from other sections. The relative poverty of the South has its compensations. It places at the command of the public school system of the Southern States, at remuneration which would seem absurdly small elsewhere, a teaching force of real culture and the truest refinement. This high social average of the Southern teachers means that the training of the children of the South is in the hands of worthy representatives of its thought and feeling. It means that in its public school system the South to-day is touching through its *best* the life of the future.

There was nothing exclusively sectional in the attendance. There was a small representation of students from the North and the Middle West. The faculty, which numbered about seventy-five, was selected with rare catholicity of appreciation. New England men like Dr. William T. Harris, U. S. Commissioner of Education, and C. Hart Merriam, of the U. S. Geological Survey, together with distinguished representatives from New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, met upon the same platform with the many well-known educators of the South. There was everywhere among the students a feeling of intense devotion to Southern interests, but this feeling was fused with a national patriotism which was often given spontaneous and moving expression.

On July 4, assembled in the large temporary pavilion upon the University campus, the great school gave its indorsement to the following "Declaration." The document bears the names of the following representative committee: Chas. W. Dabney, president; Chas. D. McIver,

secretary; A. A. Abbott, for Arkansas; Arthur Williams, for Florida; Joseph D. Smith, for Georgia; J. T. Gaines, for Kentucky; Edwin A. Alderman, for Louisiana; D. H. Hill, for Mississippi; Collier Cobb, for North Carolina; Ernest Wiggins, for South Carolina; Wickliffe Rose, for Tennessee; A. L. Malone, for Texas; B. R. Smith, for Virginia, and Edgar Gardner Murphy, for Alabama.

"We, the teachers attending the Summer School of the South, representing every Southern State, do, on this the day of our national independence, unanimously adopt the following declaration of educational policy:

"1. We bear grateful testimony to the great sacrifices made in behalf of education by the people of the South, who in their desolation and poverty have taxed themselves hundreds of millions of dollars to educate two races.

"2. Notwithstanding these efforts, we are confronted with the appalling fact that the large majority of the 3,500,000 white children and 2,500,000 black children of the South are not provided with good schools. In 1900 ten Southern States having twenty-five per cent. of the school population of this country owned only four per cent. of the public school property and expended only six and a half per cent. of the public school moneys. We must recognize these conditions and frankly face them. We therefore declare ourselves in favor of a public school system, State supported and State directed, in which every child may have the open door of opportunity.

“ 3. Conscious of our dependence upon the God of our fathers, and believing that the highest and truest civilization can be attained only by following the precepts of the great teacher, Jesus Christ, we favor the recognition of the Bible in our public schools.

“ 4. We regard local taxation as the foundation upon which a public school system should be built, and therefore favor an agitation in behalf of such taxation in every community.

“ 5. If an increased expenditure of money is to be of lasting value, a more intelligent public interest must be brought to bear upon our schools. But even greater than the need of money and interest is the need of intelligent direction.

“ 6. A mere extension of the present school term with the present course of study will not meet the needs of the children. The lines of development in the South must be both agricultural and mechanical. Our people must bring a trained brain and a trained hand to the daily labor. Education should be a means not of escaping labor, but of making it more effective.

“ The school should be the social center of the community, and should actively and sympathetically touch all the social and economic interests of the people. In addition to the usual academic studies, therefore, our courses should include manual training, nature study and agriculture.

“ 7. To secure more efficient supervision, to encourage grading and to broaden the social life of the children, we favor the consolidation

of weak schools into strong central schools. It is better in every way to carry the child to the school than to carry the school to the child. We indorse the movements recently made by the women of the South for model schools, built with due regard to sanitation, ventilation and beauty.

“8. Teaching should be a profession, and not a stepping-stone to something else. We therefore stand for the highest training of teachers and urge the school authorities of every State to encourage those who wish to make the educating of children a life profession. We call upon the people to banish forever politics and nepotism from the public schools, and to establish a system in which, from the humblest teacher to the office of state superintendent, merit shall be the touchstone.

“9. We express our hearty appreciation of the noble work of the Southern and General Education Boards, which by their earnest sympathy and generous means have made possible this great Summer School of the South and in numerous other ways are strengthening the patriotic efforts of the Southern people to improve their educational conditions.

“10. With gratitude to our fathers for the heritage of a noble past, with thankfulness to God for the many blessings bestowed upon our people, with due recognition of our present problems and their deep importance, we face the future with a faith which we shall endeavor to make good by our works, to the lasting glory of our Republic.”

Such words were not the expression of a merely formal enthusiasm. Nothing was more

strikingly evident among these hundreds of teachers than the high average of individual earnestness. Here were throngs of men and women (the latter were, of course, in the majority) giving their precious vacation weeks to better preparation for the service of their profession. Many of them had never known salaries larger than thirty or thirty-five dollars per month, many of them were expending practically the whole of their slender savings in meeting the expense for railway travel, for board, for the few necessary books (there was no charge for tuition save the registration fee of \$5), and yet every sacrifice was made, and the serious work of the School was continued until the end—all in an atmosphere of pervasive cheerfulness and amid every evidence of buoyant and hopeful courage.

There was upon the part of some an almost too eager desire to get the full measure of return from every hour. Upon the part of all there was, for the serious instruction, the response of genuine intellectual enthusiasm—not only the hunger for light, but the joy of a co-operative sympathy—a desire for the best and a desire to put it at once to work. There was not merely a zeal for admiring things, but a zeal for using them. The dominant note, the constant and heroic note, was, therefore, practical. All in all, I have never witnessed anything finer in American life.

What was seen at Knoxville might also have been seen, though upon a smaller scale, at a number of other points throughout the South—under the auspices of the University of Virginia at Charlottesville; under the auspices of

the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; at Rock Hill, South Carolina, and also in Florida, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. The friends of the Summer School of the South have gladly aided in the maintenance of some of these other schools. The further development of such institutions will prove of the very highest value. Though smaller in size, they are served by able faculties, they are doing thorough work, and they are ministering to specific needs which cannot be fully met even by such an institution as that at Knoxville. In a few instances, such as the Summer School at Chapel Hill, they have behind them a long and noble record of efficient and patriotic service.

Especially at Knoxville, however, it is intended to continue what, upon a still larger and more comprehensive scale, may be termed in a peculiar sense "The Summer School of the South"; a school not exclusively for Knoxville or for Tennessee, but for all the South. Here those teachers who may wish at small expense to study together at some common Southern point may find inspiring local and climatic conditions and a faculty so large as to permit the broadest selection of courses. The promoters of the School hope to provide a great representative institution, well organized and well equipped, presenting an ample range of subjects through the very ablest teaching force that careful selection and adequate resources can command. It is expected that the number to be admitted will be fixed next year at an enrollment of three thousand.

The creation of such a school has been the result of the wise and effective leadership of Dr. Charles W. Dabney, President of the University of Tennessee, and Director of the Publication Bureau of the Southern Education Board. Dr. Dabney has been assisted by the Superintendent of the School, Prof. P. P. Claxton, who brought to the service of the institution his broad experience and a very marked executive capacity. There was also the loyal and constant co-operation of a selected group of special agents, largely comprising the administrative staff of the University of Tennessee. . . .

II

While the Southern Education Board holds no direct or official relation to the Summer School of the South, the essential forces of the two organizations are largely identical. The success of the school at Knoxville was in part the outgrowth of that general educational revival at the South in the development of which men like Dr. J. L. M. Curry, Dr. Edwin A. Alderman, President of the Tulane University of New Orleans, and Dr. Chas. D. McIver, President of the State Normal College at Greensboro, N. C., have given such long and splendid service. Dr. Curry and Dr. Frissell, President of the Hampton Institute, were necessarily in Europe during the session of the School, but both Dr. Alderman and Dr. McIver were members of its faculty. Of the other members of the Southern Education Board, Dr. Walter H. Page, Dr. Wallace Buttrick and Mr. Edgar Gardner Murphy, the Executive Secretary, were also present, and

there was continuous and generous co-operation from Mr. Robert C. Ogden, the President, from Mr. George Foster Peabody, the Treasurer, from Mr. William H. Baldwin, Jr., from Mr. H. H. Hanna, and from Dr. Albert Shaw.

Such an institution, however, is not the out-growth of only one locality or of only one group of men. It represents the converging point of many lines of interest and co-operation. The success of the methods of the Southern Education Board, an organization not yet a year old, has been due not so much to any new element in its methods or to any distinctive quality in its personnel, but rather to the spirit in which its methods and its personnel have touched the interests of the South.

The Board has touched the life of the South not upon the assumption that local initiative is absent, but upon the assumption that the many noble evidences of its presence may well challenge the co-operation of an intelligent patriotism. The Board has worked not upon the understanding that the failure of earnestness demands the offensive solicitude of the missionary, but in grateful recognition of the fact that the South with an abundant earnestness, in trying to bear alone those burdens which the whole country has created, deserves in her national task something of a national response.

The Board has dreamed of no “colonization of strange teachers.” It has attempted to serve the teachers of the South. The Board has had no candidates for public educational positions. It deals with such candidates only after the people have made their choice and have named their representatives. The Board has sought to

introduce no educational hierarchy, either parallelling or supervising the educational systems of the Southern States. It has taken these systems in good faith precisely as they are. It has sought to aid the South through the established systems and the appointed authorities of the South.

The Board's conspicuous interest in white education, and the many gifts of the General Education Board to white education, have been noted from the first. Yet it is well understood that the needs of our colored people are receiving sympathetic and generous recognition. The Southern Education Board is frankly in favor of negro education. Yet it has advocated the education of the negro not as a distinctively "Northern" programme, but rather as a Southern programme, inasmuch as negro education is—under local administrations elected by the people—the official and authoritative policy of every Southern State. The Board believes in the amplest, best and soundest possible teaching for both races, but the Board has had no thought of suggesting that these races should be taught together in the same school room and graduated together from the same institution. There are some questions which the South has decided, which the South has the right to decide and which it is neither desirable nor necessary to debate. The characteristic purposes of the Southern Education Board are not factious or controversial, but fraternal, sympathetic and practical.

To this spirit there has been genuine response. The slight opposition that has arisen from time to time has almost entirely vanished

with the more general understanding of the policy of the organization. In Virginia the work of Dr. Frissell has been supplemented by the engagement of Dr. H. St. George Tucker, formerly of Washington and Lee University, as Field Agent for that State, together with Dr. Robert Frazer. The State Superintendent of Education; Mr. Brent, Secretary of the State Board of Education; the authorities of the University of Virginia, at Charlottesville, and the Governor of the State, the Hon. A. J. Montague, are offering earnest and effective co-operation. Strong assurances of co-operation have also come from the State Superintendents of Education in Florida and South Carolina.

In North Carolina, Governor Aycock and State Superintendent Joyner have given Dr. McIver their aggressive and untiring support. Local interest has been awakened and stimulated. In a number of counties the people, by popular vote, have taxed themselves for larger appropriations to their public schools. As I write, some twenty of the strongest public men of the State are conducting one of the most remarkable campaigns in the history of the South for the larger development of the public school system of North Carolina. Much of this stirring and patriotic work is the fruitage of the years of service given to this cause by Dr. McIver and Dr. Edwin A. Alderman, once the President of the University of North Carolina, and now the President of the Tulane University of New Orleans.

In Louisiana, Dr. Alderman is continuing the

work with which he was so long identified in his native State. He has the co-operation of Governor Hurd, of the leading journals of Louisiana, and of many of the strongest public men. Definite and gratifying results are coming clearly into view. Dr. Alderman has had, in Mississippi, the co-operation of the State Superintendent of Education, and the aid of Chancellor Fulton, of the State University. No specific work has yet been attempted in Texas and Arkansas.

In Alabama, the native State of Dr. Curry, the Supervising Director of the Board, and the home of Mr. Murphy, the work of the organization has had the unanimous indorsement of the State Educational Association and the ready and helpful support of the State Superintendent of Education. The Field Agent for Alabama, the Hon. Joseph B. Graham—one of the most virile factors in the life of the State—is attending the teachers' and farmers' institutes held in many of the counties. He is thus meeting the people personally and is addressing large and responsive audiences on the subject of popular education. When Mr. Graham closes his present series of meetings he will have spoken almost daily—sometimes twice a day—for a period of almost two months. The demand for his presence has been so great that the acceptance of all his invitations has been a physical impossibility. The attitude toward the work of the Board on the part of the leading men and the influential journals of the State is well illustrated by a recent editorial expression of the Montgomery Advertiser:

“ In North Carolina, in Virginia, in Tennessee, in Louisiana—in all the States of the South in which the Southern Education Board has undertaken active work, the organization has had the emphatic indorsement not only of the chief executive, but of the people. This has been due to the wise and generous fidelity with which the Board has served the welfare of the South.

“ Its chief interest is in the development of our public schools—especially the public schools of our rural communities. Its policy is not interference, but co-operation. The Board is free from all entanglements, whether ecclesiastical or political. The motive of its work in this State, according to the standpoint of the reader, may be called patriotic or educational or religious, but we believe this motive may be described very comprehensively and very briefly in one simple phrase.—‘The Children of Alabama.’

“ So noble a work, under the guidance of resourceful and trusted leadership, will receive the grateful confidence of our people.”

In Georgia there have been similar expressions of appreciation from such representatives of the press as the Atlanta Constitution and the Atlanta Journal. The State Superintendent of Education and the Superintendent-elect have given active co-operation, and the authorities of the University of Georgia have made that historic institution one of the most powerful factors in the development of a perfect understanding between the representatives of the Board and the people of the State. It is here, in the buildings of the University, that Dr.

Wallace Buttrick, the Executive Officer of the General Education Board, is in consultation with the County Commissioners of Education —coming for an informal conference from every section of the State. Of these, 131 out of a total of 137 have signified their acceptance of the invitations.

This meeting is in session as I write. Said the Hon. Joseph M. Terrell, the newly elected Governor of the State: "The thought of this conference was a most happy one. Dr. Buttrick, I commend the wisdom of your Board in bringing it about. The voice of this conference a few moments since in extending its thanks to you and your Board for the interest you have taken in the advancement of the educational affairs of Georgia expresses the sentiment of the people of Georgia."

It was at Athens, the seat of the University, that there recently assembled by special invitation of the Legislature of Georgia the fifth session of the Conference on Education in the South. This body is the popular gathering, of which the Southern Education Board is, in a sense, the executive authority.

Those who had the privilege of attending this latest session have counted it among the great and vital privileges of a life-time. The gracious hospitality of the people, the charm of perfect weather—in the opening days of our Southern Spring—the responsive interest of the audiences, the range and dignity and intrinsic value of the discussions—marred by no unfraternal or discordant note—all united in the composition of what will rank as one of the noblest and happiest occasions in the history

of the educational movements of our century. In addition to the many well-known visitors of the North, there were present distinguished representatives of every Southern State. The Southern men have gone back to their work with a renewed sense of the responsibilities and the privileges which it places on them. They know that they are meeting the nation's need as well as the need of their people, and they are cheered by a more intimate knowledge of the interest and the friendship of all their countrymen.

The task before the South is one of startling magnitude. It is not the bare problem of illiteracy, but the problem of the illiteracy of hundreds of thousands of the negroes upon the one hand, and of scores of thousands of the purest American stock in the country upon the other. It is not a problem of indifference. It is often the problem of intense earnestness, of untiring effort, struggling with the task of educating the masses of two great populations out of public resources which are clearly inadequate. The South is poor, not because the South is thriftless, but because the South is so largely rural—a rural population thinly settled upon undeveloped lands. A better day is coming. The whole situation, industrially as well as educationally, is full of hope. In the meantime, however, we must face the fact that some of our Southern States now provide a public school term of less than 100 days, and yet we must not fail to put this fact in conjunction with another which reveals the educational earnestness of their people—the fact that of the total revenues of certain of these

States 50 per cent. are now devoted to the development of the public schools.

No people anywhere are making larger sacrifices in the interest of education than the people of the South.

So long, however, as public resources are so inadequate the conditions of illiteracy, even in the stronger race, cannot be less than serious. The representative of a Southern college has thus put the facts: "Throughout the whole eleven States of the secession one person in six (16.44 per cent.) native whites, children of native parents, 10 years old and over, cannot read and write; while in North Carolina and Louisiana, which are the worst individual States in the section [Alabama is not far ahead], one white person in every four is totally illiterate. No other eleven States in the Union anywhere nearly approximate this condition. The eleven States outside of the South which have the highest rate of illiteracy in the Union show only 7.7 per cent. of illiterates as against 16.44 per cent. of white illiteracy in the South. The negroes are not included. These figures deal in every case with none other than native whites, children of native parents."

If we add to these figures the numbers of our white people who can just pass the test of literacy, who perhaps can barely sign their names, but who are practically illiterate, our conditions are seen to be still more serious.

Such, distinctively, is "the Southern task"; with all its bearings upon the religious, industrial and political life of the Southern States, with all its consequences to the welfare, peace,

and happiness of the nation. The task is one of appalling proportions and of infinite complexity. It has been the purpose of this paper to indicate, even though superficially, some of the forces which are now at work upon it.

And yet the members of the Southern Education Board and of the General Education Board would be the last to assume that they stand alone in their educational activities or that they represent (in the spirit of the Pharisee) a monopoly of educational patriotism. The South is gloriously rich to-day in the possession of hundreds, indeed thousands, of men and women to whom the education of all the people has come to signify, commercially, politically, religiously, the primary policy, the immediate duty, the dominant consecration of Southern effort.

At such an institution as that great school at Knoxville these many lines of activity are seen to meet. They there converge upon the strategic point of the training of the teacher; and though the training of the teacher represents but one point in the movement of education, yet at this one point much of the soul of progress stands revealed. For, as in a magic glass, one may see in the face and spirit of the teacher the revelation of the community and the regnant importance of the child.

Nothing nobler, nothing more full of promise, can be said of any civilization than that its ablest leadership and its deepest civic enthusiasms are at the service of its children; and this, whatever may be said as to the failures or misapprehensions of the past, I believe we may say to-day of the South.

E. G. M.